ASA is pleased to announce the Thematic Sessions for the 2026 ASA Annual Meeting. These sessions offer a unique opportunity to explore and expand upon the meeting theme, “Disrupting the Status Quo: Putting Sociology to Work for a More Equitable Society,” fostering deeper engagement with key sociological issues and perspectives.

Actionable Solutions: Sociologists in the Field

This session gives space to sociologists in the field putting the theories to work. This can include building community and coalitions, success in implementing policies, involvement in local government or grassroots organizations, or work being done by a nonprofit organization.

Advancing Intersectional Equity among Faculty: Evidence from the NSF ADVANCE Program

The NSF ADVANCE program has a long history of supporting interventions to make systematic changes on college campuses to increase the intersectional gender diversity and equity of STEM departments. The program has led to many changes in how faculty members are hired, promoted, and supported, for example, through work-family policies or leadership programs. Sociologists have been heavily involved in ADVANCE programs, particularly once it became clear that social science research was important to the enterprise of “institutional transformation.” ADVANCE-funded research has not only drawn on but also contributed to sociological theories of gendered and racialized organizations, expectation states theory, as well as relational inequalities.

Yet, this knowledge has been challenged. On the right, the federal government has been working to reduce spending on “illegal DEI,” defunding programs like ADVANCE based on the idea that it creates inequalities by advantaging women and people of color within higher education. On the left, including within sociology, many have critiqued the effectiveness of these programs, suggesting that they have led to cosmetic changes rather than true institutional transformation. What have we learned about how to create systemic change? How have sociological ideas about intersectionality become embedded more broadly in understandings of inequality in higher education? What role has sociology played in designing and evaluating programs associated with ADVANCE? What can be carried forward,

given the current environment?

Best Practices for Community Partnerships

This session will invite participants to reflect on and identify promising practices to support all kinds of community partnerships, defined generally for this session as those involving cross-sector collaborations between universities, practice/policy-facing agencies (such as school districts), and community-supporting agencies. There is a growing recognition that these types of partnerships are essential for changing who gets to participate in the production of research-based knowledge, which has important downstream implications for supporting better conditions that lead to research use (NASEM, 2023). Although promising, these collaborative efforts are challenging to launch and sustain, especially because the larger systems in which these partnerships sit are typically not supportive of such endeavors. This session features four leaders in the research-practice partnership space, bringing a diverse set of experiences in supporting cross-sector partnerships that will provide a solid foundation from which to explore promising practices. Following brief introductions and overviews of each partnership, we will engage session participants in a robust discussion exploring partnership tensions and promising strategies.

Beyond Academia: Leveraging Your Sociology PhD in Non-University Careers

Join a panel of accomplished professionals who have successfully applied their sociology PhDs outside the traditional academic path. This session explores how advanced sociological training can translate into impactful careers in government, non-profits, industry, policy, tech, and more. Panelists will share their career journeys, discuss transferable skills, and offer practical advice for navigating the job market beyond the university setting. Whether you're exploring options or actively planning your next step, this conversation will provide inspiration and actionable insights.

Black Placemaking as Health-Making: Rethinking Health in Place

Too often, Black spaces are viewed as unhealthy, pathological, or harmful in some way. However, this should be

approached as an empirical question rather than a fixed assumption. More scholars need to explore when, where, why, and for whom Black spatial contexts matter. Crucially, the default framing of these spaces as pathogenic or disadvantaged should be rejected. Instead, scholars should develop a framework that recognizes Black places can be salutogenic and beneficial. To achieve this, the panel asks: how can we move toward a more transformative understanding of race, place, and health in the 21st century? In line with the conference theme of "Disrupting the Status Quo: Putting Sociology to Work for a More Equitable Society," this session will challenge traditional urban and health literature by exploring new paradigms of thinking and rethinking health in place. Approaches will include analyzing nationally representative health data, community-based health data, climate-related health experiences, and cultural perspectives on health and neighborhoods. Throughout these quantitative and qualitative methods, the panel will focus on the agentic and collective practices of Black placemaking to consider how a space can be organized to promote both physical and mental health.

Building AI With Communities, Not Merely For Them: What Sociology Brings to Participatory Design and Tech Justice

As artificial intelligence rapidly transforms social life, a critical question emerges: Who gets to shape these technologies and on whose terms? At this pivotal moment, the role of sociologists has never been more urgent—not only as critics and evaluators, but as co-creators in the development of emerging systems. This panel brings together sociologists and AI researchers to explore collaborative approaches to building more just and accountable technologies. Moving beyond models that reduce communities to data sources or end-users, we highlight practices that engage them meaningfully throughout the entire lifecycle of technological development. By advancing concrete strategies for building AI with communities, not merely for them, this panel offers a vision for public sociology in the age of AI—one in which the design and development of technological systems are viewed as core sociological obligations. We invite attendees to reimagine sociologists as indispensable architects of our technological futures.

Changing Minds: What Scholars Know about How to Shift Beliefs

The resilience of status beliefs, stereotypes, moralized commitments, cultural schemas, etc. are key the reproduction of inequitable status quos. Comparatively little scholarly attention has focused on how we change beliefs. What do sociologists know about when and how people change their minds about important topics? How can this work be leveraged for equity and promoting social change in institutions and organizations?

Climate Adaptation Across the Rural-Urban Divide: Lessons on Place-based Solidarities and Political Action

The accelerating pace of climate disaster is raising crucial questions about how communities can enhance their resilience and mitigate future harms in the face of entrenched socio-economic interests. Outcomes hinge in large part on how effectively actors can leverage post-disaster solidarity into political struggle that transforms policy and builds durable, more liberatory social structures—and these dynamics vary considerably across urban and rural settings. This session highlights recent scholarship at the intersection of the climate crisis, urban studies, and rural sociology. Panelists will address: (1) how American cities come to “know” and act on climate risks, and how these resilience efforts impact the racial formations of the city; (2) how climate displacement and the housing crisis are exacerbating one another across the wildland-urban interface in California, with implications for solidarity and political struggle; (3) disaster resilience and self-organized collective action among farmworkers in rural Florida; and (4) the role of international institutions in mediating possibilities for climate adaptation and resilience among rural and migrant populations in Bangladesh.

Collaborative Learning Strategies in Race and Ethnic Studies

This thematic panel brings together educators and practitioners to share innovative approaches to collaborative learning in Race & Ethnic Minorities, Social Inequality, and related sociology courses. These courses often explore complex and emotionally charged topics that require critical thinking, empathy, and historical insight. As such, they offer fertile ground for high-impact pedagogical practices including group work, peer dialogue, and community-based learning.

Panelists will present on the following key strategies:

1. Collaborative Problem-Solving: Designing assignments that prompt students to work together to analyze and address racial and ethnic disparities.
2. Peer-to-Peer Learning: Facilitating critical dialogue across differences through student-led discussions and structured peer feedback.
3. Community Engagement: Connecting sociological theory to practice through partnerships with local organizations and movements.
4. Empowering Student Voices: Building egalitarian classrooms where students actively shape course content and co-create knowledge.

College Presidents Putting Sociology to Work

When faculty assume high level university administrative positions, how does their sociology background influence their role performance and decisions related to work environments for faculty and learning environments for students? Do sociologists do things differently than their economists or engineering colleagues? Can they do things differently given the common broader pressures on higher education today? The panel assembles sociology faculty who serve or have served as college presidents to reflect on these issues, and how and to what purpose we could put sociology to work in university administration.

Connecting Research and Grassroots Organizations

Too often, research institutions and grassroots organizations operate in silos, missing opportunities to combine evidence-based insights with lived experience and community power. This session explores how dynamic partnerships between these two sectors can accelerate social change, drive impactful policy solutions, and advance justice. Join us to examine models of collaboration that bridge data and organizing to deliver transformative outcomes.

Desired Childbearing Amidst Rising Pronatalism: What Role for Sociology?

In the media and public at large, there is considerable concern about the appearance of a lower fertility rate in the United States, and around the world. These declines have

given rise to a pronatalist politics that seek to shape Americans' childbearing decisions. At the same time, there is evidence that Americans would like to have more children than they are currently having. Sociologists might be concerned about both of these trends under a Reproductive Justice (RJ) framework, which includes the right to not have children as well as to have children, along with resources and support necessary to do so. What is the role of sociology in this debate? What might allow all people to have and parent the children they want? To date, it is not clear that interventions like direct payment, tax credits, or parental leave policies are allowing people to fulfill their fertility desires. What's more, some interventions might be coercive and/or perpetuate rather than ameliorate inequities related to gender, race, and class. This session will include discussion of policy interventions as well as broader sociological theory on topics such as changing family structures, gendered labor, romance and courtship, medically assisted reproduction, social movements, immigration, race and eugenics, and climate change. This panel discussion invites critical stances on questions of decreased fertility rates and changing population dynamics.

Disrupting the Discipline: Community, Youth, and the Struggle for Sociological Justice

This panel brings together scholars whose work is grounded in abolitionist, decolonial, and community-based epistemologies to reimagine access to sociology beyond traditional academic spaces. In the face of rising authoritarianism, surveillance, and exclusionary policies in both education and public life, panelists explore how sociology can be mobilized as a liberatory tool within K–12 settings, community organizations, and broader grassroots movements. Through public-facing scholarship, mutual aid networks, and classroom practices that center youth, Indigenous sovereignty, and racial justice, these scholars demonstrate how community-rooted sociological work can resist fascist logics and contribute to building a more just and collective future.

Diversifying STEM Workforce in Global Contexts

Around the world, a more diverse and inclusive workforce in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields contributes to greater technological development and

social wellbeing. While much of the prior scholarship has centered on the United States, this invited panel shifts the lens to explore how countries beyond the United States have approached STEM diversification. We feature a diverse group of scholars who engage with comparative research on STEM workforce across Europe, Asia, and North America. Panelists will examine how national contexts and cultural norms shape both the challenges and the opportunities along the STEM pipeline, offering critical insights for building a more equitable global STEM workforce.

Elevating Sociological Voices in Public Policy

One important avenue for sociologists to create social change is through public policy. Historically, policy discussions prioritized the expertise of economists (and, to a lesser extent, political scientists) in providing research, data and analysis to solve contemporary social problems. However, sociologists are uniquely positioned not only to deepen our understanding of social problems, but to reimagine public policy in ways that value lived experiences, center equity in a policy agenda, integrate mixed methodologies and highlight the complexity of the social world. Drawing on multiple policy domains, this panel highlights the opportunities for sociological voices to shape the policy process and improve policy outcomes. It challenges sociologists to actually articulate the unique contribution of the discipline to these discussions, rather than simply holding up sociological research alongside that of other disciplines. To do so, the panel will address how sociological approaches differ from those of other disciplines, and ask participants to be more assertive in highlighting those differences. Consistent with the meeting theme of disrupting the status quo, this panel emphasizes opportunities to work for a more equitable society through multiple levels of policy, including local, state and federal policy.

Evaluating Strategies for Improving Disability Equality

This session examines and evaluates characteristics of normative and non-normative actions which have been used in the pursuit of rights, services, and an end to ableism by and for people with disabilities. One paper uses quantitative data to examine the success of disruptiveness used in tactics by the Disability Rights, Independent Living and related social movements. Two papers discuss disability-related successes

and failures related to voting, candidate choices, and other aspects of normative political behavior. The summary paper discusses how public problems, and responses to them, are shaped by social, historical, cultural, and other factors, in order to assess the possibilities for success in the future for various types of strategies.

Expanding Horizons: Preparing Sociology Ph.D.s for Careers Beyond Academia

As the academic job market tightens, sociology departments are increasingly preparing Ph.D. students for diverse career paths beyond the professoriate. This panel pairs faculty with those outside academia who are leading efforts to equip students with the skills, the experiences, and the networks necessary for roles in government, non-profits, industry, and beyond. Panelists will share strategies for integrating non-academic career preparation into graduate training, discuss challenges and opportunities, and offer insights into reimagining success for today's sociology Ph.D. students.

How Can Sociology Disrupt the Status Quo in U.S. Health Policy?

Under the current presidential administration, we have seen significant threats to healthcare access, public health, and health promoting social policies in the U.S. Despite our discipline's theoretical frameworks and methodological tools, sociologists have often ceded health policy leadership opportunities to adjacent fields. This session asks: How can sociologists more meaningfully impact health policy? What core sociological insights can animate research agendas to disrupt the status quo in health policy? How can we position existing scholarship and produce new knowledge to meet this political moment? This panel will feature scholars working across multiple areas to invite a conversation on how our discipline can catalyze change in health policy.

How Sociologists Can Improve the Use of Research Evidence in Policymaking

Sociological research has the ability to transform public policy and construct an equitable future. A key factor contributing to policymakers' use of research evidence is having trusting relationships with researchers (Oliver et al., 2014). For scholars, building relationships with policymakers and other decision makers can be challenging as they often

have differing incentives, timelines, and goals. The panel conversation centers the experiences of publicly engaged sociologists as they reflect on the complexities of working with policy actors that may not share their commitments, participating in political systems that have historically excluded or harmed marginalized communities, and cultivating a public scholarly identity in a politically volatile climate. The conversation will focus on practical strategies for scholars to engage publicly while advancing the use of research evidence in policymaking.

Imagining Reproductive Justice

Reproductive Justice is a powerful framework for motivating change in an era characterized by the continuous erosion of reproductive and other rights. The sociological imagination challenges us to transcend the individual to consider how private troubles can be better understood as public issues. This session will bring panelists together to discuss how sociological and transdisciplinary research can work in tandem with reproductive justice to help advance social justice, enhance reproductive health, and protect reproductive rights.

Impact and Influence Outside of the Sociological Ivory Tower: Building the Next Generation of Policy, Practice-Based, and Applied Sociologists for Social Change

The debate between pure and applied research is a long-standing issue in sociology. Recognizing the widespread social inequality in American society and the rapidly changing landscape, it is clear that sociology is uniquely positioned among other disciplines to produce research that informs policy, practice, and narratives, promoting positive changes that benefit all communities. This session explores what it entails to build a more robust field of applied and engaged sociologists within and outside of the university, including creating pipelines, offering training and support, resources, partnerships, and other forms of capacity-building. Questions that the session will answer include: How can universities and bureaucratic infrastructure better support solutions-focused research? How can universities transform perceptions of applied research as a service by changing policies, teaching courses that focus on applied research, and supporting students who desire applied jobs at foundations, community-based organizations, think tanks, research firms, or public policy organizations that directly impact lives in

local communities? Overall, the session seeks to enliven and embolden the potential, possibilities, and impact that applied research in sociology can have on local and national issues facing communities most impacted by inequality.

Interventions in Inequality: Constructing Workplace Equality

How can we produce and sustain equality at work? This panel brings together scholars studying inequality across diverse organizations and workplaces—from cooperatives and corporations to sex work and tech work—to offer new reflections on the pathways and processes through which they construct workplace equality.

Interventions in Inequality: Sexuality

Interventions in Inequality: Sexuality is part of a series of thematic sessions highlighting scholarship on positive social change being made within key social systems. This session will focus on research that utilizes intersectional frameworks to study the reduction of sexual inequality. The papers focus on a wide range of themes and populations, including Black LGBTQ+ Migrants, Autistic Adults and Crip Sexualities, Black Asexualities, and Trans desire and pleasure.

Navigating the IRB while Partnering with Communities to do Research

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is a critical component of ethical research, particularly when working in partnership with communities. This session will explore the complexities, best practices, and challenges of navigating IRB processes while maintaining strong, equitable collaborations with community partners.

Drawing on the experiences of the Kinder Institute for Urban Research (KIUR), panelists will discuss how research projects are co-developed with community stakeholders and translated into IRB-compliant protocols. Topics will include identifying and aligning data needs, establishing data sharing practices, and developing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and data sharing agreements. The session will also highlight strategies for communicating these processes across institutional and community contexts to ensure transparency, protect all parties, and streamline research

implementation.

Polycrisis, Solidarity, and Political Action

Disasters are often accompanied by a sense of political optimism. As rupturing events, crises are seen as opportunities to catalyze transformative social and political change. In a time increasingly defined by "polycrisis"—the combination of climate chaos, global pandemics, economic insecurity, and warfare—it is crucial to examine whether and how such transformative change might be achieved. Evidence shows that disasters produce an immediate surge in solidaristic sentiment and action. However, mutual aid efforts, political organizing, and government investments in social welfare too often fade after the acute period of crisis. Under what conditions can publics, organizations, activists, and governments leverage post-disaster solidarity into political struggle that transforms policy and builds durable, more liberatory social structures? This session combines insights on solidarity and political action across a range of disasters and sociological subfields. Topics include: (1) how the insurance industry is shaping the kinds of solidarities that arise in the wake of climate disaster; (2) what the global memorialization of COVID deaths tells us about how societies grapple with mass mortality; (3) reflections on the mutual aid networks that arose in New York City during the pandemic; and (4) the relationship between mutual aid and political activism in populations targeted with state violence.

Positive Change in Healthcare: Interventions for Sociology, Politics, and Policy

This panel brings together scholars working on social problems in healthcare internationally and in the U.S. to discuss ways to reduce inequalities within the healthcare system. Panelists have expertise in racism in health, contemporary U.S. healthcare policy, global health, insurance policy and practices, trans rights, infertility, gender and sexuality in health, and aging and eldercare. Describing and theorizing inequality is often easier for scholars than outlining solutions. But positive social change is possible, and so we reflect on how it has happened and can happen again in organizations, through mobilization, in technologies, and politically.

Promoting Equity When We're Prohibited from Saying It: Pushing Back Against the Attack on DEI

What can we, as educators, do to counter the government-sponsored attack on diversity, equity, and inclusion? This thematic session brings together a group of action-oriented junior and senior scholars who use their positions in their field to promote inclusion, particularly during the Trump administration. Invited panelists will discuss strategies to promote DEI and novel ways of resistance during these unprecedented political times. These include, but are not limited to, organizing an equity-focused conference, funding inclusion-centered projects as institute directors, speaking up during faculty meetings, writing public opinion pieces, and conducting research on diversity, equity, and inclusion. The group of scholars in the thematic session has a demonstrated record of going beyond merely paying lip service to DEI. Attendants will leave with ideas on how to strategize ways of resistance from their different academic positions. This thematic session will also reflect on topics discussed during the 2025 DEI Thematic session.

Public Sociology: Past, Present, and Future

In 2004, Michael Burawoy named Public Sociology as the theme of the annual ASA meeting and his ASA presidential address invigorated discussions and debates on the purpose of the discipline. It challenged the status quo and continued to call into question sociology's knowledge: for whom and for what? More than two decades later, this thematic session will focus on how public sociology has been conceived of and advocated for in the past; how it is being done in the present; and sketch a vision for the future. Drawing on different contexts, speakers will examine how public sociology disrupts the status quo and contributes to building a more equitable, just, and sustainable world.

Putting Sociology to Work in Research Funding

This panel brings together sociologists who work, or have worked, in governmental and nonprofit funding agencies to think about how sociology informs organizational missions and research funding decisions. Accomplishments and challenges of sociology research funding will be discussed. Given the rapidly changing environment related to science funding, the panelists will also address just-in-time developments.

Reproductive Politics: Global Comparisons

The politics of reproduction have undergone dramatic shifts over the past decade. Countries like Argentina, Ireland, and Mexico – historically known for their restrictive policy environments – expanded access, and experienced the birth of new coalitions pushing for progressive change. Meanwhile, in countries like the United States and El Salvador, the policy environment became more restrictive and conservative movements advocating fetal rights gained political influence. In this panel, we trace key transformations in the cultural, political, and legal environments surrounding reproduction in the United States, Argentina, El Salvador, Senegal and Burkina Faso. This panel provides descriptive information on ongoing efforts on the ground, aims to understand the linkages between ostensibly disparate sites, and also asks how sociologists and sociological knowledge can contribute to efforts to enhance reproductive justice.

Shifting Racial Ideologies in the 21st Century

How are racial ideologies shifting alongside key issues afflicting U.S. and global society a quarter into the 21st century? From the re-normalization of overt expression of racism, the mainstreaming of white nationalism and fascism, the growth of the multiracial right, the success and limits anti-racist initiatives and movements, or the ongoing genocide in Gaza and shifting definitions of antisemitism. This session assembles a group of leading scholars to discuss these and other issues and how they are contributing (or not) to shifting our understanding of racism and racial ideologies today.

Sociological Contributions to Artificial Intelligence

As artificial intelligence systems become central to many domains of social life — from healthcare to education to the workplace — this panel highlights the unique contributions sociology can make to cross-disciplinary conversations about AI. Responding to the conference's call to put sociology to work for a more equitable society, we explore how sociological insights can sharpen critiques of AI and inform its design, deployment, evaluation, and governance. The panel asks: How can sociological concepts, theories, and

methods enrich technical and normative debates on AI? How might community-engaged sociological research democratize AI development and foster more comprehensive evaluations? And what changes within our discipline could better support scholars working at these intersections? Bringing together scholars with diverse substantive and methodological perspectives, we aim to show how sociology's theoretical richness and methodological range can be leveraged to shape AI systems in ways that bridge inequalities while advancing human wellbeing, creativity, and institutional accountability.

Sociology at the Nexus of Public Health

Sociologists are uniquely positioned to examine structural forces that undermine public health and offer solutions. This session will highlight persistent public health issues that are shaped by inequality and will explore how we can use sociological frameworks to understand and ameliorate public health challenges.

Sociology in Action: Advancing Health Equity for Persons and Populations with Disabilities

In 2023, the National Institutes of Health designated people with disabilities as a "health disparity population," acknowledging the disproportionate health challenges they face and marking a major step toward health equity. This recognition prioritized research to understand and address the root causes of health disparities for people with disabilities—alongside racial and ethnic minoritized groups, those with lower socioeconomic status, and sexual and gender minorities. However, shifts in the federal landscape have since deprioritized people with disabilities in NIH and federally funded research, undermining this progress. As equity for people with disabilities fades from federal research priorities, it is imperative that sociologists champion research in this area. This session showcases innovative research and scholars who advance this agenda, applying a sociological lens to deepen understanding of social inequality and health disparities affecting people with disabilities. Guided by Dr. Jennifer James, a Black Feminist scholar, the moderated panel will feature leading scholars who take intersectional and structural approaches to studying disability and health. The dialogue will invite audience engagement to foster critical exchange and advance sociology's commitment to engaged research and to

creating a more just and inclusive society.

Solving Social Problems with Interdisciplinary Teams

This session brings together scholars and practitioners who are breaking disciplinary boundaries to tackle pressing social problems using innovative methods such as crowdsourcing, megastudies, and collaborations between academics and practitioners. We will examine the contributions and challenges of interdisciplinary research and explore how prepared we are to translate scientific insights into practical solutions for urgent societal issues.

Under Threat: Defending Social Science in an Anti-Science Age

In an era marked by growing polarization, science denial, and disinformation, the social sciences face escalating challenges—from skepticism and political interference to drastic funding cuts. This session explores the multi-faceted attacks on social science and the broader implications for democracy, public policy, and social science itself. Panelists will examine how sociology has become a political target, the consequences of defunding and dismantling crucial data-gathering institutions and enterprises, and the erosion of trust in expertise. At the same time, this session will make the case for why sociology is more essential than ever—shedding light on inequality, informing public health, understanding political behavior, and guiding efforts to address crises.

White Urbanism in Ruins: Agency in Black and Brown Spaces

Urban sociology overwhelmingly focuses on marginalization when studying social phenomena, including segregation, crime, policing, and health disparities, to name a few. While important, this approach can obscure the complexity and agency of marginalized populations. It also promotes the dehumanization of Black and Brown people. Sociological research that fails to capture the everyday ways that racially marginalized groups resist domination and assert agency continues to center the white gaze both within our discipline and at our institutions. This panel builds on recent developments in Black and Latinx Sociology that simultaneously recognize the ongoing impacts of white

supremacy, while centering local epistemologies, problem-solving, and strategies that emerge from marginalized communities. Understanding how groups engage in joy, meaning making, and agency is equally important for addressing structural inequality. Panelists identify new perspectives on the relation between race, space, and agency. They consider the multiplicity and complexity of communities of color in urban areas. More specifically this panel will address issues of taxation, growth-oriented politics, grassroots social infrastructure, collective joy, and representation in majority Black and Latinx spaces.